



Infantry Battalion COIN Operations

LIEUTENANT COLONEL JOHN LUTTRELL

The 1st Battalion, 149th Infantry “Mountain Warriors” mobilized for deployment to Iraq on June 27, 2006. The battalion reported to Camp Shelby, Mississippi, for post-mobilization training and began departing for Kuwait on September 27. The Mountain Warriors assumed their mission as an Area Defense Operations Center (ADOC) for Camp Slayer on October 30.

The battalion had a complex mission. Headquarters Company and Alpha Company were responsible for the base defense of Camp Slayer by manning entry control points and towers, while having Ugandan contractors augment additional towers. In addition, Alpha Company patrolled an area of operations (AO) known as AO Mountain Warrior, which was approximately a three-kilometer urban area through Al Furat, and HHC had one platoon designated as the quick reaction force (QRF) for the battalion. Bravo Company ran the Multi-National Force-Iraq Joint Visitors Bureau located on Camp Victory. This included running a hotel, convoy escort, and personal security details for all distinguished visitors entering Iraq. Charlie Company was responsible for base defense of the Radwaniyah Palace Complex by manning entry control points and inner perimeter towers. In addition, C Company patrolled an AO (AO Mutt) that was approximately 12 kilometers in a rural area that consisted of a village named Makasib. The battalion had 80 Soldiers in civilian clothes with relaxed grooming standards providing operational security teams for the Strategic Command Intelligence Detachment and the Command Liaison Element. We deployed as a separate infantry battalion assigned to a Base Defense Operations Center (BDOC) for the Victory Base Complex along with two other active duty battalions and a National Guard brigade headquarters. We had no Iraqi Army, Iraqi National Police, or Iraqi National Guard assigned to the battalion, or to our brigade headquarters. Both AO Mountain Warrior and AO Mutt consisted of mainly Sunni Muslims from



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LTC John Luttrell (left), commander of the 1st Battalion, 149th Infantry Regiment, talks with members of the Al Furat Council August 31, 2007.

various tribes. Neither Al Furat nor Makasib had any form of local government when we arrived.

Combat Operations (AO Mountain Warrior & AO Mutt)

The battalion conducted more than 2,100 combat patrols and 28 battalion (-) cordon and search missions during the deployment. We had 142 small arms fire engagements with insurgents and numerous mortar and rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) attacks. We did conduct joint operations with Iraqi Army and Iraqi Police units. However, these were units that sought us out in order to conduct joint operations or ones that we asked for in order to conduct mosque raids or some type of joint operation. From my perspective, the Iraqi Army units were more organized and less corrupt than the Iraqi Police units. My Soldiers enjoyed working with the IA because of their professionalism and how they treated the local people. The IPs that worked in and around our area were made up of a majority of Shia Muslims; this caused conflict in Al Furat, since it was about 90 percent Sunni Muslim. A canal ran north to south separating AO Mountain Warrior (Al Furat, which was Sunni dominated) from Al Jihad (Shia dominated). The Shia and Sunni differences fueled sectarian violence in our area. In Makasib, the few existing Shia Muslims had lived there and fit in well with the Sunnis, therefore the sectarian violence was far less. However, there was more of a threat from Al Qaeda and other extremists (Taqfiri) in this area. Our main threat in this area was from improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

In our initial assessment, we wanted to clear AO Mountain Warrior from insurgents, extremists, militia, criminal elements or anyone else detrimental to stability. Since there had not been a consistent coalition force presence in this area since 2003, we needed

to focus on saturating the area with patrols. In our initial assessment of AO Mutt, we wanted to secure Makasib and the outlying area in order to prevent sectarian violence from spilling over into the Makasib area and to deter Al Qaeda influence. We averaged approximately 17 hours a day patrolling, with at least 70 percent of these patrols dismounted. Patrols that I will focus on here are **house assessments, mosque monitoring, council meetings, influential leaders meetings, and targeted searches.** Every patrol had to be approached as a combat operation. For example, while moving to an influential leaders meeting with a local imam (religious leader), my patrol was engaged and a firefight ensued for 45 minutes. Eventually, with attack aviation, the battalion QRF and help from an adjacent patrol with M2 Bradleys, we forced the enemy to break contact with us. We sustained no serious injuries, and the enemy incurred several casualties.

House Assessments: These were conducted in order to constantly gather information on established metrics for the AO and to evaluate the population and community. In addition, there was a heavy rate of migration in and out of Al Furat in the beginning of our deployment due to sectarian violence. Many times a militia element would evict the owners of a house and use it to conduct insurgent operations or as a safe house. By maintaining a constant assessment, we could determine if forceful displacement was occurring. The assessments also allowed us to gain the trust of the local citizens. First, they were getting assurance that we were providing security on a consistent basis. Second, they began to trust our Soldiers because our Soldiers asked about their needs (fuel, water, food, etc.) and respected their culture. Finally, we were able to determine who the local sheiks or other leaders were in the communities.

Mosque Monitoring: This was vital in order to keep in touch with the “pulse” of the local community. Iraq’s religion is an integral part of their society, and the imam is

a very respectful and influential person. Our patrols would set up a hasty checkpoint or sometimes even cordon the area of the mosque. In Al Furat we were responsible for four mosques. The security threat in the area where the mosque was located would often dictate the technique used for monitoring. For example, the Al Furat mosque, which bordered the canal separating Al Furat and Al Jihad, had been closed and was being used by militia. Once we conducted a clearing operation, we were able to reopen the mosque. However, we would often establish a cordon during monitoring in order to give the citizens a feeling of security. We would send a patrol set of four vehicles to the mosque. The patrol would establish an outer cordon with their vehicles and secure the block where the mosque was located. Next, the patrol would dismount and establish a loose inner cordon occupying key areas where they could interact with local citizens. By doing this, citizens gained a vital sense of security yet did not feel as if my Soldiers were interfering with their religious practice. The Al Furat mosque often sent out negative messages on a regular basis early in our deployment. After we brought security and stability to the area, the Al Furat Imam was very appreciative of this effort and felt like it afforded the citizens more of an opportunity to attend prayer at the mosque. In Makasib, we monitored two mosques. However, we never had any type of negative message come from either of these locations. As we began to establish our presence in

Al Furat, the messages turned positive, and good relationships were built through a constant presence.

Council Meetings and Influential Leaders Meetings:

One of the civil-military areas of concern was the lack of local government. In Al Furat, there was not a local government and only a Neighborhood Advisory Council (NAC) appointee who did not even live in the neighborhood. In Makasib, there was a person who had worked with the previous unit in obtaining a few projects for the community. He was well versed in how contracts were written, had good business sense, and was fearless. Through consistent patrolling, we were able to identify the influential people in the area. In order to do this, patrols needed to dismount and interact with the local populace daily. Tribal councils were initially formed of local sheiks. Understanding the tribal society in Iraq was critical and allowed us to assess initial concerns from the sheiks. We wanted to separate the tribal council from the city council in a delicate manner. This was accomplished by incorporating influential members of the community with some of the sheiks in order to form a city council. In Al Furat, we had a dentist, a former Saddam-era Iraqi captain and engineer, and a teacher, along with two sheiks forming the council. In Makasib, we had the person who had worked with the previous unit, an educator, and two sheiks form a city council. Initially, these were done without elections. However, there were elections in both areas before our

deployment ended. Each council would have weekly meetings. The company commander responsible for the area attended each meeting, and I would attend at least one every two weeks.

I also conducted influential leaders meetings with local imams, sheiks, business men, or headmasters of local schools. By establishing an early dialogue, trust, and building relationships, we were able to gain valuable intelligence on militia and criminal activity in the area. On one occasion in Al Furat,



Courtesy photo

The author discusses issues with key Iraqi civilian leaders.

a mortar attack on one of my dismounted patrols was called off. A local militia leader had a mortar positioned and had called for ammunition. When one of the council members found out, he immediately confronted the militia leader and told him that the attack would disrupt all of the good happening in the community and only upset the Americans. An attack which could have inflicted severe casualties on my dismounts was stopped because of the relationships that we had built.

On another occasion in Makasib, I was notified by one of the local council members of an IED on a road where three vehicles had been hit in the last 10 days. The IED was 350 pounds of homemade explosive (HME) buried underneath a bridge. After dispatching a patrol and confirming the IED, we brought Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) out to dismantle the IED. While EOD was working on the bridge, a local sheik called and told us that we were sitting on an IED. I acknowledged that we knew an IED was on the bridge and were working on it. He informed me that the IED he was talking about was out beside of one of our M1151 HMMWVs. I radioed the company commander who was on the ground and informed him of the intelligence. The patrol found two artillery rounds command-wired and buried in the side of the road near one of our vehicles. Both IEDs were disposed of and another attack which could have had devastating casualties was avoided because of relationships and trust that our unit had forged.

Targeted Searches: This type of patrol occurred frequently during the early months of our deployment, especially due to the intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) assets and feeds from these assets available to my battalion. A patrol may be sent to search a specific house, building, or courtyard based on human intelligence (HUMINT) or an ISR asset. These types of patrols were more common in AO Mountain Warrior rather than AO Mutt due to the urban area of Al Furat. Numerous insurgents and weapons caches were captured by patrols conducting targeted searches. Some of these patrols were planned and others were hastily executed due to actionable or time-sensitive intelligence. Therefore, the units had to be proficient in standard operating procedures

on how to conduct this type of mission. On some missions, we would emplace small kill teams from our snipers in order to provide overwatch and report information on the target. Rapidly securing and entering the target area were critical to success. Our enemy rarely wanted to stand and fight it out with us. He was, however, proficient at blending into the local populace, using secondary explosive devices, and employing hoax IEDs. The majority of the time, Soldiers had to clear from the bottom up, unless they were moving to adjacent houses or buildings that could be reached from one roof to another. The QRF was always ready to react in order to reinforce the patrol, facilitate the evacuation of casualties, or any other action deemed necessary. Through the use of ISR assets with a direct feed to our ADOC, information could be radioed directly to the patrol to include grid coordinates and target description. At times, target searches were hastily executed, and often the cordon would have to leapfrog in order to continue the search. One of my biggest concerns was making sure the dismounts were always covered and supported by the gunners from their vehicles. In addition, communications for dismounts were paramount. A great tool for us that our state provided was the secure

XT-5000 Motorola radio. All platoon sergeants and above carried these on patrol which supplemented the multiband inter/intra team radio (MBITR). By having the necessary communication, a patrol leader could place a two-to-three-man team on a roof in order to support the search and have secure communication between dismounts and vehicles.

Intelligence and Information Gathering (AO Mountain Warrior and AO Mutt)

As stated above, ISR assets were critical to the success of our operations. Live feeds into the ADOC from the aerostat balloon, the Joint Land Attack Elevated Netted Sensor System (JLENS) camera, or tower-mounted cameras on the perimeter allowed information to be collected on targets, population activity, confirm or deny enemy courses of action, and maintain a battalion common operating picture. Because we did not deploy as part of a brigade combat team (BCT), we did not have unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). Therefore, the camera assets were tools that our battalion relied on for information gathering. Even though the aerostat feed went directly into the ADOC, we did not have control of the camera. However, we could request the



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Soldiers from Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 149th Infantry Regiment scan their surroundings as they patrol through Al Furat August 20, 2007.



Specialist Leith Edgar

The author meets with a class of Iraqi students in the Al Rasul school west of Baghdad April 17. Soldiers with the battalion dropped off school supplies and toured the newly remodeled facility during the visit.

aerostat through one of the ADOC computers. On some missions, we would request and receive approval for the aerostat for a specific time frame. We would then place a liaison in the aerostat cell so that we did not have to rely entirely on the computer. The ability to track insurgents as they moved from one rooftop to another or as they entered a house one way and then exited another enhanced our success rate at capturing weapons, detaining insurgents or criminals, and increased force protection for our Soldiers. We literally had eyes in the sky. Limitations were weather, such as wind and sand, as well as maintenance on the balloon.

Every combat patrol gathered some type of intelligence or information. Intelligence gathering is a big part of the coalition forces' and the Iraqi forces' mission — Every Soldier Is a Sensor. Also, we wanted to be able to monitor information throughout the communities we operated. Any change of attitude from the citizens could mean a spike in attacks on our patrols, that threats from local militias were being made, or possibly a surge of sectarian violence. By constantly visiting with the locals, we could monitor the atmospherics as well as gather information. In doing this, we were able to attack the insurgents' will to fight and any unity that they were trying to build. Continuous communication with the local leaders and populace was vital. Much of the insurgency is sourced through economic, religious, or tribal means. For example, an IED that is placed would likely have a cell to produce the IED, a cell to transport it to the area, and then hire a teenager or some young adult to emplace the IED for \$100. Therefore, it may not be necessary to seek total destruction of the insurgents, but only to shatter their will to fight and cohesiveness. Because of strict rules of engagement (ROE) and wanting to limit collateral damage, firepower was not always

our best weapon in counterinsurgency operations. Through information gathering and many times treating an area like a crime scene, we could gather evidence and build detention packets to take insurgent leaders off the streets. The ability to gather evidence and build a case for detention was a steep learning curve for the entire battalion. My S2 did an excellent job in getting outside resources to teach our patrols how to gather information and evidence in order to build solid detention cases.

Two other forms of intelligence and

information gathering assets that were successful were HUMINT and signal intelligence (SIGINT). Using a HUMINT source, we were able to capture a large cache just outside our perimeter wall with several RPGs, artillery rounds, mortar rounds, anti-tank mines, anti-personnel mines, HME, assault rifles, and various other ammunition and weapons that could have been used in a complex attack against us. The unique thing about this source is that the person was a Sunni giving us information on other Sunni insurgents, which was rare. Usually, we received information from Shias regarding Sunnis or vice versa. This source was later killed while confirming identification of a high value target (HVT) for us at a mosque in Al Furat. The HVT had called the source and asked to meet him at the mosque. The source contacted us and told us of the meeting; he felt it was an ambush to kill him. We asked him not to attend the meeting. However, he said his death was inevitable and he would meet the HVT. I placed a patrol set at a gate near the mosque in order to react to anything. When the source pulled up in his vehicle, men came out of the mosque and opened fire. I launched the patrol, and they immediately began treating the wounds of the source and securing the area. However, the victim bled out quickly, and the HVT escaped. This source is an example of the commitment by Iraqi citizens to have a better life even if it meant their own death.

Again, by not being part of a BCT, we did not have the SIGINT assets afforded to other battalions. However, we did establish a very good relationship with the C2. The C2 was responsible for all intelligence operations under Multi-National Corps-Iraq (MNC-I) and was under the command of Lieutenant General Raymond T. Odierno. Through this relationship, we were able to target and eliminate two indirect fire (IDF) cells targeting the Victory Base

Complex. In addition, we conducted a joint operation with the 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry in which we captured two men involved in the kidnapping of two 10th Mountain Division Soldiers. Again, SIGINT was the asset that allowed complete success without sustaining any coalition force casualties.

Civil-Military Operations (CMO)

This was a crucial area that I overlooked during pre-mobilization planning and training. In developing a deployment roster with a mobilization cap dictated by the National Guard Bureau, I had to prioritize slots. In doing this, I cut the CMO NCO and two assistants and left a major as the CMO officer. Once we arrived in theater, I quickly realized the significance of this mistake. However, we were still short manpower on manning towers, entry control points, and patrols. Therefore, I moved a very intelligent lieutenant in as the assistant CMO officer. Through civil-military operations, we were able to complete nearly \$2 million in projects for the citizens of Iraq in a 12-month period. As mentioned earlier, the building of relationships, trust, and being able to take leverage away from the insurgents on an economic basis was critical to our success and the fact that we did not have a single Soldier killed in combat.

Initially, I wanted to gain a foothold in the communities by addressing needs of the citizens. I decided the best avenue for this would be humanitarian aid drops. Since the drops would occur in the early stages of trying to establish a local government, I decided to make the drops at the Rahman Mosque, where I had developed a good relationship with the imam. This was the foothold that we needed to begin earning the trust of the people. During our deployment, I tried to focus the priority of effort in CMO towards education and not only securing the schools but refurbishing and reequipping them as well. Sectarian violence had deterred many children from attending school and several of the schools had significant damage from the fighting. We refurbished seven schools in AO Mountain Warrior and AO Mutt, while dropping needed school supplies to each location. We also had a sewage treatment facility built in the town of Makasib, which allowed raw sewage to be cleaned from the

streets. In my assessment, I felt that giving the people a sense of pride about their community would increase their willingness to keep it safe. One of the National Guard's greatest strengths is the fact that we are Citizen-Soldiers. Because of this, we have a great sense of community service and how to interact with communities.

One mission that seems to be tasked to the National Guard often is convoy logistic patrols (CLPs), which is essentially a convoy escort from one forward operating base to another. In this type of mission, it is difficult to control your own destiny because you cannot build the relationships with the local populace in order to increase your force protection. However, we were able on a daily basis to control our own destiny by our interaction with Iraqis. We did this by respecting their culture and their traditions, listening to their side of the story, and being brutally honest with them at all times. One of my biggest sayings to local leaders was, "If I have it, then it is yours; if I do not have it, then I will not promise it to you." These people had been given empty promises for years and we needed to show that when we said something, it would happen.

Finally, Sunni reconciliation began prior to our departure. Mirroring the "Awakening" in Al Anbar province, local Sunni sheiks were being asked to form volunteer police groups and establish checkpoints or even in some cases patrol neighborhoods in order to defeat Al Qaeda and other extremist organizations. In actuality, we were probably one of the first to initiate this. In Makasib, we allowed them early on to establish checkpoints with armed guards going into and coming out of the town. In conjunction with 1-18th Infantry, we began to establish checkpoints throughout the Radwaniyah area. We helped three local sheiks in our area establish five checkpoints made up of local Sunni volunteers. We helped with the construction of the checkpoints but did not furnish any weapons or pay. Initially, we used a humanitarian aid drop to be distributed among the volunteers because we were not allowed to pay them for their service. However, through the efforts of 1-18, we did get payment started for every checkpoint in the Radwaniyah area before we departed. This effort drastically reduced IED emplacement. As a last ditch effort to

maintain an insurgent foothold in Makasib, a suicide bomber attacked Makasib in August. The local guards shot the attacker before he got into the city council building, but he was still able to detonate himself. We responded and evacuated the local guards for treatment and all survived. The checkpoints had solidified the Radwaniyah area and brought stability to the area. We were able to quickly put this plan into action for a couple of reasons: First, the Makasib city council chairman was the business savvy and fearless leader with whom we initially began relations and who had been an important ally to us. Second, we had developed good relations with the local sheiks through constant visits and projects in their area of influence. They believed in us enough to start the checkpoints knowing that the volunteers may not get paid.

We realized that kicking in doors and hunting targets were only part of fighting an insurgency. The biggest part was building relationships and a better way of life in the communities. Through various types of patrolling techniques and a proactive civil-military operations strategy, the Mountain Warriors brought security, stability, and a better way of life to the people of Al Furat and Makasib. Citizen-Soldiers are unique and bring an abundance of talent and skills to a unit. Units need to use these strengths when they are conducting counterinsurgency operations. As National Guard Soldiers, we are a community-based organization. We are trained in responding to natural disasters and other emergencies that provide aide to the citizens of our community. In addition, we are trained in our military occupation skills in order to accomplish our military objectives. During the 1-149th's deployment, these combined assets proved to be a successful formula for COIN operations.

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